

Massachusetts Pre-School and Kindergarten
Learning Standards in the Domains of Social-
Emotional Development and Approaches to
Play and Learning

Literature Review

Deliverable 5: Background Research
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Review of the Literature

The resources listed in this review of the literature reflect a growing body of research about early childhood social and emotional development and approaches to learning.

Why focus on social emotional development, and approaches to play and learning now?

The preponderance of outcomes from both research and evidence-based practice clearly indicate the positive connection between social and emotional learning, academic learning, and success in life.

“Positive social and emotional development provides a critical foundation for lifelong development and learning. In early childhood, social and emotional well-being predicts favorable social, behavioral, and academic adjustment into middle childhood and adolescence. It helps children navigate new environments, facilitates the development of supportive relationships with peers and adults, and supports their ability to participate in learning activities. Children with emotional or behavioral challenges are likely to receive less adult support for development and learning and to be more isolated from peers. In the domain of Social & Emotional Development, programs need to ensure that children who are dual language learners can demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language.” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010: Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, Social & Emotional Development)

How do we support children’s social and emotional development?

Research also tells us that the most ideal conditions occur when children begin to spend time out of their homes engaged with other children and adults – usually in early education and care settings; when there are positive classroom relationships between adults and children, children and children, and adults and adults; when there are focused opportunities for increasing social and emotional understanding; when there are connections to academic curriculum; and when these elements are used along with rich play experiences and constructive use of resources and materials.

As Massachusetts continues to develop comprehensive learning standards for all children that address students’ total span of education, we must use what we have learned to ensure that all children have robust learning experiences in all domains, and that our education professionals have the knowledge and guidance to provide those experiences. Critical to the success of this endeavor is the program, district, and state endorsement and knowledgeable fostering of practices in social and emotional domains, support of play as a learning and teaching strategy, and respect for diverse engagement approaches that include all children.

Why do we need standards for social and emotional development and approaches to learning?

“Social emotional learning [SEL] standards... provide guidance for schools in the kinds of SEL skills students should have, how to align academic and SEL goals, and how to make SEL a core part of their mission.” (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Learning standards traditionally have focused on academic content, but SEL standards are gaining attention. Many states have developed SEL standards at the early childhood level. Fewer have included them in the broader K-12 standards. This literature review will assist in framing additional learning standards for Massachusetts preschool and kindergarten programs.

Massachusetts’ recently released statement “Building the Foundations for College and Career Readiness for Children from Birth through Grade 3” (2014) presents a comprehensive view of the vision for the

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children of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and introduces broad competencies for children's development and learning.

Massachusetts now embarks on its effort to create social emotional learning standards for preschool and kindergarten, with the support of the Department of Early Education and Care [EEC], and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE]. Creating a specific focus on SEL will bring particular attention to this critical area of child development and learning. Currently, Massachusetts has many SEL standards that are embedded in the *Curriculum Frameworks* (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education) and/or the *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences* (Massachusetts Department of Early Education & Care) in various academic areas (with the primary focus found in standards for Comprehensive Health), but developing free-standing standards for social and emotional development and approaches to play and learning will fill in the gaps and put in place the missing pieces of Massachusetts' strong foundations for early development and learning.

The following represents a thorough review of research that has been done on the development and assessment of SEL Competencies and Approaches to Learning in preschool and kindergarten. It includes investigation of the skills, attitudes, environments, relationships, and approaches that teachers and providers need in order to support the development of the desired child competencies. The work of other states and recognized organizations in early childhood education and care have also been consulted.

What do we know about Standards for Social Emotional Development and Approaches to Learning?

The advice offered and lessons learned from research and from standards in other states will be beneficial in guiding Massachusetts in creating standards for social and emotional development and approaches to play and learning. For example, Kagan, Scott-Little & Reid (2012) compare 7 sets of national and state standards and compare national data to Massachusetts data. They present data indicating where standards link, are strong, weak, or are not at all connected. In a follow-up summary document (Deliverable V, 2013), the authors support Massachusetts in addressing a learning continuum (birth-5) and highlight efforts to align the standards to the Common Core. While they agree that the infant/toddler standards are well balanced, deficits are noted in both Pre-K and Kindergarten standards in social and emotional development and approaches towards play and learning. The authors note that the Head Start Child Development Early Learning Framework (HSCDEL) directly promotes social and emotional development and approaches to play and learning. They recommend that Massachusetts place specific focus on social and emotional development, approaches to play and learning, and cognitive processes, while supporting culture development and language acquisition. In addition, the authors created a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the full study, highlighting the task outlined by Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, describing the current standards, their strengths, deficits, and making recommendations (2012a). The final summary report (2013) presents a detailed analysis of the content and alignment of the Massachusetts early learning and development documents.

Zinsser, Weissberg & Dusenbury (2013) call for alignment of social emotional learning [SEL] standards in harmony with growing attention to SEL by state and federal policymakers. They point out that only a few states currently have comprehensive, free-standing SEL standards at the K-12 level, although many have aligned standards at the early childhood level (PreK-3).

Education Development Center (2009) reports similar findings, noting that "the CASEL state scan of SEL standards indicate that the preschool arena is ahead of K-12 state standards with regard to comprehensive standards for children's social and emotional development, but most states currently have SEL standards at the preschool level."

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Smith (2008) presents a crosswalk of various national standards (NAEYC, DEC, AAP/APHA/NRC) along with an inventory of practice developed by CSEFEL (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning). Logue (2007) explains how early childhood standards can bridge success for children entering kindergarten and prevent children from being excluded from needed learning experiences because of challenging behaviors.

What does research tell us about social and emotional learning (SEL) and development?

Massachusetts' vision for Social and Emotional Development is that "All children from birth through grade 3 will develop and maintain trusting, healthy, and positive interactions and relationships with both adults and peers; develop a positive sense of self and self-efficacy; express a healthy range of emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; understand the role of social interactions; and develop the skills needed to regulate attention, impulses, and behavior. *Essential experiences provide emotional stability, security, and mental well-being; promote the development of self-regulation and executive functioning skills; increase social awareness; creative positive and enriching opportunities for social exploration, growth, and learning with both peers and adults; and promote the development of collaborative and positive relationships between early educators and families.*" Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Building the Foundations for College and Career Success from Birth through Grade 3*, September, 2014)

Definitions of social and emotional learning overlap, are similar in intent yet subtly different in terminology.

Payton et. al. (2008) define social and emotional learning as "the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to:

- Recognize and manage their emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Demonstrate caring and concern for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Handle interpersonal situations effectively"

Denham & Brown define SEL as: "effectiveness in interaction, the result of organized behaviors that meet short- and long-term developmental needs." They outline core competencies of SEL as follows:

- *Self-Awareness*: includes the ability to accurately assess personal feelings, interests, values and strengths
- *Self-Management*: includes the ability to handle one's emotions in productive ways, being aware of feelings, monitoring them, and modifying them when necessary so that they aid rather than impede the ways in which the child is able to cope with varying situations. This aspect also includes handling stress, persevering through obstacles, and *expressing* emotions appropriately. Important non-emotional aspects of self-management are paramount to success in the preschool to primary school years including being able to regulate one's social and academic behavior (working memory, attention, and inhibitory control). Finally, some researchers include self-motivation and goal setting.
- *Social Awareness*: includes the ability to take others' perspectives, understand their feelings and empathize with them, and appreciate others' similarities and differences. Understanding their own and others' behavior and emotions give them crucial interpersonal information that can guide interaction.
- *Responsible Decision Making*: becomes increasingly important as children learn to solve social problems, analyze social situations, set prosocial goals and determine effective ways to solve differences. It incorporates understanding the emotions inherent in the current interaction and their consequences. It also includes the ability to make appropriate ethical decisions that consider and

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respect others and promote the well-being of the school and community.

- *Relationship Skills*: the goal is to promote positive and effective exchanges with others and ultimately relationships that last over time. Numerous skills are crucial including making positive overtures to play with others, initiating and maintaining conversations, cooperating, listening, taking turns, seeking help, and practicing friendship skills (e.g., joining another child or small group, expressing appreciation, negotiating, giving feedback). In addition, skills related to being assertive (resisting peer pressure to engage in unsafe, unethical, or unlawful conduct), resolving conflict, and addressing the needs of all concerned via negotiation develop during the preschool to primary school period.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) explains that early emotional experiences are literally built in to the architecture of young children's brains. When feelings are not well managed, thinking can be impaired. All early childhood programs, including Head Start, must balance their focus on cognition and literacy skills with significant attention to emotional and social development.

Domitrovich, Dusenbury & Hyson (2013) explain the significance of SEL to an early childhood system:

- These competencies influence children's school readiness and later school success;
- Experiences at home and in school can either enhance or undermine these competencies;
- Social and emotional competence influence and support academic achievement;
- Well-developed executive function skills (planning, focusing attention, managing emotions and behavior) improve outcomes across many areas of development and learning;
- Children who are more engaged and persistent do better and are more likely to stay in school.

"Successful students develop personal strengths including grit, tenacity, perseverance, and positive academic mindsets. They also learn broader social and emotional competencies such as interacting with diverse individuals and groups in socially skilled and respectful ways; practicing positive, safe, and healthy behaviors, and contributing responsibly and ethically to their peers, family, school, and community." (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013)

Varela et. al. (2013) examine the quality of resilience and its impact on learning, particularly in contexts of adversity. They say "Social and emotional learning helps children develop the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed to foster healthy relationships with peers, manage conflict with others, express care and concern, and work effectively with peers and teachers. Common examples include empathy, respect, cooperation, managing emotions, critical thinking, self-control, goal setting, problem solving, among others. The resulting social and emotional competencies contribute to the overall well-being of children and youth, improved academic performance, healing and coping with chronic exposure to violence."

Clearly, social-emotional development influences children's learning, behavior, and adjustment, which in turn impact what happens in schools and programs. Likewise, schools, programs, and teachers can impact children's development and adjustment by recognizing and nurturing these foundational skills and attitudes. Weissberg & Cascarino (2013) say "Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker. Schools can help prevent or reduce many different risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out) when they engage in multiyear, integrated efforts to develop students' social and emotional skills."

What are "Approaches to Learning" and Why Do We Need to Address them?

The descriptors for SEL and Approaches to Learning cannot be placed into neatly labeled buckets. Terminology is inconsistent and may vary in different arenas. The skills/attitudes are often termed interchangeably as dispositions, attitudes, and executive functions, and may include a variety of

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competencies such as curiosity, creativity flexibility, resilience. Approaches to Learning are not separate or different from SEL skills, but rather they support, connect and overlap with each other.

Massachusetts' vision for Approaches to Play and Learning is that "All children from birth through grade 3 will develop curiosity about the world around them and excitement about exploration and learning; increase confidence about their ability to gain knowledge and skills; and build the ability to be proactive, independent, and collaborative learners. *Essential experiences provide opportunities for discovery, problem solving, and the acquisition of knowledge through interesting and interactive activities; promote creativity, cooperativeness, and persistence; and support individualized growth, learning, and multiple pathways to success.*" (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Building the Foundations for College and Career Success from Birth through Grade 3*, September 2014).

PBS Parents (Child Development Tracker on Approaches to Learning, 2014) presents a website that defines Approaches to Learning as: 1) initiative, engagement and persistence; 2) curiosity and eagerness to learn 3) reasoning and problem solving 4) invention and imagination. They describe the environment and strategies that teachers and parents can use to support these dispositions and attitudes.

According to HighScope Educational Foundation (2014): "Approaches to learning affect how children learn in every other content area, encompassing children's engagement, motivation, and participation in the classroom. By understanding how to support this area of early development, adults can foster children's creativity, curiosity, confidence, independence, initiative, and persistence as they carry out their intentions, solve problems, and engage in a variety of learning experiences. Many of the skills/abilities that fall under this domain are often described as 'executive functions' which include being able to break down a task into its components, organize a plan of work, follow through on it, and reflect on the success of one's efforts. In the HighScope curriculum, adults encourage these abilities by providing opportunities for six "key developmental indicators" that comprise approaches to learning. Additionally, the HighScope "plan-do-review process" is a central part of the children's daily routine that strengthens these essential skills. In the HighScope Preschool Curriculum, Approaches to Learning are carried out in the following ways:

- . *Initiative*: Children demonstrate initiative as they explore their world.
- . *Planning*: Children make plans and follow through on their intentions.
- . *Engagement*: Children focus on activities that interest them.
- . *Problem solving*: Children solve problems encountered in play.
- . *Use of resources*: Children gather information and formulate ideas about their world.
- . *Reflection*: Children reflect on their experiences."

Daily, Burkhauser & Halle (2010) say "approaches to learning, one area of development that describes a child's attention and engagement in learning, is described by the National Education Goals Panel as the least understood, the least researched, and perhaps the most important dimension of school readiness. Their overview of states' Early Learning Guidelines and school readiness assessments, notes that many states' guidelines do not yet include approaches to learning. They say "the states that incorporate approaches to learning most frequently include aspects such as curiosity, initiative, reasoning, problem solving, persistence, engagement, and/or reflection."

Da Ros-Voseles & Fowler-Haughey (2007) describe the link between dispositions and effective learning, identifying four dispositions indicative of the effective learner:

1. *Independence*: the ability to be self-sufficient, to self-organize, and [to] self-manage. Helping children feel responsible allows them to become self-sufficient.
2. *Creativity*: characterized by those children who show curiosity and interest in their world; allow

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children make their own decisions in the creative process.

3. *Self-motivation*: enabling “children, independently, to become deeply involved and engrossed in activities and challenges.” Motivated children expend the necessary energy to achieve their goals.
4. *Resilience*: evidenced by children’s ability to bounce back “after setback, hindrance, or frustration and retain temperament, personality, and spirit.”

Research on Self-Regulation

Bodrova & Leong (2008) explain the connection between self-regulation in behavior and learning in kindergarten: “If a neural system is repeatedly exercised, it will continue to develop, as with exercising a muscle. Conversely, if children do not systematically engage in self-regulatory behaviors at a young age, the corresponding brain areas may not develop to their full potential. The authors present evidence that self-regulation can be taught, and offer strategies for classroom teachers. Self-regulation is described as “a deep, internal mechanism that enables children as well as adults to engage in mindful, intentional, and thoughtful behaviors. Self-regulation has two sides: 1) It involves the ability to control one’s impulses and to **stop** doing something, if needed (e.g., resist the immediate inclination to blurt out the answer when the teacher poses a question to another child); 2) It involves the capacity to **do** something (even if one doesn’t want to do it) because it is needed, such as awaiting one’s turn or raising one’s hand. Self-regulated children can delay gratification and suppress their immediate impulses enough to think ahead to the possible consequences of their action or to consider alternative actions that would be more appropriate. This ability to both inhibit one behavior and engage in a particular behavior on demand is a skill used not just in social interactions (emotional self-regulation) but in thinking (cognitive self-regulation) as well (e.g., to read the word *cat* when it appears under a picture of a dog, a child must overcome the desire to pay more attention to the picture and instead focus on the word). They report that research shows that children’s self-regulation behaviors in the early years predicts their school achievement in reading and mathematics better than their IQ scores. They offer practical classroom strategies that teacher can use to foster self-regulation skills.”

A recent blog by Ellen Galinsky (2014) describes a study on the long-term benefits of self-control: A long-term study from New Zealand (Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study) tracked people from childhood to age 32, finding that self-control pays off in many ways on a long-term basis. Children who were found to have greater self-control as children continued to have self-control in major life functions in adulthood. The study team, led by Terrie E. Moffitt of Duke University, found that children with more self control were healthier and wealthier in their 30s, regardless of their own families’ background. Galinsky suggests practical strategies for helping children learn self-control.

Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D. specializes in brain research. His writings (2005) provide neurological and psychological foundations about self-regulation. “The capacity for self-regulation matures as we grow. Infants are born with an undeveloped capacity to self-regulate [cannot communicate or meet own needs but is dependent upon an attuned adult to meet them]. The transition from external to self-regulation is one of the most important tasks of growing up. Healthy self-regulation is related to the capacity to tolerate the sensations of distress that accompany an unmet need... When these systems develop normally, we are able to deal with complex and challenging situations with age-appropriate solutions... A child whose capacity for self-regulation does not develop normally will be at risk for many problems-from persistent tantrums to impulsive behaviors to difficulty regulating sleep and diet. What helps the stress-response systems develop in an optimal way is repetitive exposure to controllable ‘challenges.’ Every time a child is introduced to something new, a low-level alarm response is activated. But with repetition comes mastery, and what the brain once interpreted as a potential threat is now familiar and tolerable.” This is an interesting perspective, that adults need not necessarily protect children from experiencing stressful situations, but rather help them learn to cope with challenges. Perry offers practical suggestions for

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teachers/parents to help children self-regulate.

Perry (2002) outlines six core strengths for healthy child development, each of which is a building block in a child's development. While the terminology he uses is unique to his research and training, it can be aligned with the taxonomy for Head Start and/or CASEL SEL skills:

- *Attachment*: The capacity to form and maintain healthy emotional bonds with another person. Healthy attachments allow a child to love, to become a good friend, and to have a positive model for future relationships.
- *Self-regulation* (containing impulses): The ability to notice and control primary urges as well as feelings such as frustration, anger, and fear.
- *Affiliation*: The capacity to join others and contribute to a group.
- *Attunement*: Recognizing the needs, interests, strengths, and values of others.
- *Tolerance*: The capacity to understand and accept how others are different from you.
- *Respect*: Finding value in differences; appreciating the worth in yourself and in others.

Blair & Raver (2014) present a broad view of the importance of self-regulation and the foundations that support it:

- Self-regulation means focusing/maintaining attention, regulating emotion and stress response physiology, reflecting on information and experience, engaging in sustained positive social interactions with teachers and peers. A growing empirical base documents relevance of self-regulation to short- and long-term academic and behavioral outcomes in school.
- Temperamental and social-emotional aspects of the child are not separate influences on school readiness, distinct from cognitive abilities. They are interrelated integral to aspects of child cognitive ability. Executive functions and regulation of attention are centrally important for learning in school.
- Effective self-regulation is promoted by fostering the regulation of emotion, attention, and stress reactivity, primarily within the context of the family but also within the context of child care prior to school entry, especially maturation and family provision of sensitive, nurturant, and language-rich care as key influences. Studies show that exposure to supportive vs. negative interactions with parents, teachers, and peers shapes individual differences in emotional reactivity and regulation, in control of attention and higher-order cognitive functions.
- *Executive Function*: In addition to growth of academic knowledge, executive function is also seen in motivation and engagement. Executive functions are important for making sense of complex information, but skills such as working memory and inhibitory control are overwhelmed when the complexity of information is too great. Executive functions are also overwhelmed when stress is too great. As the complexity of information rises, and the task is no longer within the individual's reach, executive function abilities are less likely to be utilized, and confusion and depressed motivation are likely to ensue.
- *Social emotional competence*: In the classroom setting, attention and emotion regulation support or constrain opportunities for engagement/learning as well as relationships with teachers and peers (e.g., a small proportion of children enter classrooms with a strong tendency for reticence and anxiety when confronted with new people, places, and things, while another proportion enter with a tendency to approach new peers and new situations with exuberance rather than fear. These profiles have been associated with different engagement behaviors (e.g., behaviorally uninhibited children are more likely to talk more often in class, play more readily with new peers, and show more positive emotion than their more behaviorally inhibited counterparts). A predisposition to approach versus withdrawal has been argued to impact children's opportunities to engage with their teachers in positive ways (e.g., teachers spend more time talking with and providing instruction to children they view as more emotionally positive and less negative, difficult to manage, or clingy). Children with less regulated behaviors performed less well academically, were more likely to be absent, and to like school less.

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- *Social relationships*: Children who are more dispositionally positive may learn more (and may like learning more) when interacting with peers. Prosocially oriented children who are more likely to approach and play with peers have also been found to demonstrate greater attention, persistence, and more positive attitudes toward learning across the school year than do more socially reticent children. Research indicates that shows that moderate stress and high positive mood support executive functions and problem solving. Positive engagement with peers can extend children's attention, support encoding and retrieval of information, and support outcomes such as early reading and mathematics.
- *Student-teacher relationship*: Studies illustrate importance of the quality of interpersonal interactions between young children in the classroom for learning. Viewing standardized measures of teachers' ratings of their closeness vs. conflict with children, early relationships have been found to be moderately to strongly predictive of students' attention and engagement during classroom activities. Children engaging in lower levels of conflict with teachers in their kindergarten year demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement and more productive work habits through middle school grades.
- Research underscores how children's social and emotional functioning are shaped by classroom experience and how children may also shape it. Studies suggest that the stressful nature of low-quality care may undermine some children, with cascading influences on child emotion regulation and executive functions. So, an emphasis on the emotional climate of the classroom represents a productive pathway through which learning can be facilitated.
- Research showed that training and support in behavioral management focused on self-regulation increased children's progress outcomes.

Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum (2010) review research on the relationship between self-regulation and academic performance. They define *emotion-related self-regulation* as "processes used to manage and change if, when, and how one experiences emotions and emotion-related motivational and physiological states and how emotions are expressed behaviorally." *Effortful control* [EC] is defined as "the efficiency of executive attention - including the ability to inhibit a dominant response and/or to activate a subdominant response (to shift and focus attention or activate and inhibit behavior as required, especially when one does not feel like doing so). Social behavior and social relationships, as well as children's abilities to regulate their behavior, attention, and emotions, affect how well children do in school. Programs that target children's abilities to manage their behavior and emotion at school have positive effects on children's problems behaviors and social competence. Interventions that target EC are likely to improve children's liking of, and performance at, school; programs that improve the quality of children's social interactions and behaviors are also likely to improve motivation and performance at school."

There are many resources that can guide adults in supporting children's social and emotional competence. Epstein (2003) provides guidance on how adults can promote the development of thinking and reasoning in young children in the early years by providing two curriculum components - *planning* and *reflection*. Evidence from High/Scope supports long-term benefits. Epstein elucidates the developmental progression of children's thinking, and outlines many specific classroom applications. In addition to academic expectations, educators must also promote broader thinking abilities so that children learn to make decisions, regulate their own behavior, meet complex challenges, and take responsibility for their actions. Epstein also provides specific classroom strategies for teachers to implement planning/reflection processes, with explanation of why they are important. Jones, Bouffard & Weissbord (2013) present an array of characteristics that they attribute to resilient young children, with reference to scientific research, along with a useful list of global classroom resilience interventions, particularly valuable for working with young children with special needs. McDermott, Rikoon & Fantuzzo (2014) offer research showing that approaches to learning are

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not static but dynamic.

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (n.d.) explains that executive function (EF) skills provide critical supports for learning and development, and that they can be learned through interactions and practice. The dimensions of EF/SR skills are defined as:

- *Working memory*: The ability to hold information in mind and use it.
- *Inhibitory control*: The ability to master thoughts and impulses so as to resist temptations, distractions, and habits, and to pause and think before acting.
- *Cognitive flexibility*: The capacity to switch gears and adjust to changing demands, priorities, or perspectives.

They say: “As children develop these capacities, they need practice reflecting on their experiences, talking about what they are doing and why, monitoring their actions, considering possible next steps, and evaluating the effectiveness of their decisions. Adults play a critical role in supporting, or ‘scaffolding’ the development of these skills, first by helping children complete challenging tasks, and then by gradually stepping back to let children manage the process independently—and learn from their mistakes—as they are ready and able to do so.” They describe a variety of activities and games that represent age-appropriate ways for adults to support and strengthen various components of EF/SR in children.

How does SEL relate to academic learning/academic success and/or life success?

For generations, research has linked prosocial classroom behavior with positive intellectual outcomes and performance on standardized tests, and conversely, antisocial conduct with poor academic performance. Research has demonstrated growing support for including strategies supporting SEL in education.

Denham & Brown (2010) explain a variety of ways that SEL influences academic success:

- *“Social processes*: When a child can understand self and others, take in social information accurately to make good decisions, interact successfully, and regulate behavior, many classroom learning tasks are made easier. A child who is likely to have friends and a well-running social world, also has more personal resources to focus on learning. For the child with SEL strengths, social interactions in the classroom are replete with information about the self and how to succeed, to become competent; it is within these social environments that children learn *academic* values, standards, and motivation. Peers bond to prosocial children around both social *and* academic activities. This bonding creates a substructure of resources from which the child can pull additional academic support. Although such findings are encouraging, they also illuminate the risks for children who do not exhibit prosocial behaviors. For example, the child who is less prosocial than his or her peers may become more socially isolated and, because of this, have fewer academic resources than his or her prosocial peers. Because peers pick children with whom to accomplish school-related tasks, the peers’ side of the subjective/objective equation is in ascendance here. Conversely, children’s subjective view of peers allows them to enlist academic support from appropriate helpers. In this way, each influencing the others, children mutually create a school environment conducive to learning.
- *Engagement processes*: Many benefits accrue when one is capable of mutually satisfying experiences with peers and adults within the social setting of the classroom. Not only is one likely to be able to pay more attention to academic tasks, plan better, and devote more resources to learning, but one also may benefit more from teachers’ instructions, giving and getting academic information from peers, sharing academic resources with peers, and modeling peers’ learning skills. It is easy to see how self-management and relationship skills are linked with academic success, operating as *engagement processes*, or the amount of time the child chooses to engage in a specific activity (whether attending to the teacher in a classroom or choosing to attend to a peer in need of emotional soothing). Thus, these processes include seeking support from and giving support to others as well as making sustained

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attentional and behavioral connections with the academic material at hand.

- *Relational processes*: Exchanges and the interpretation of responses among persons work dynamically to link SEL skills with academic success (e.g., prosocial interchanges can elevate mood, which facilitates learning, and vice versa). Positive interactions with teachers and peers promote language, cognitive, and social information-processing development.
- *Representational processes* - which include encoding, interpreting, and organizing information when engaged in learning opportunities and social encounters - help researchers to understand how self- and social awareness and responsible decision making are dynamically related to academic success. SEL components of self-perceived competence, understanding of others' emotions, and social problem solving impact academic success via the knowledge structures that accompany children in everything they do. Children who lack feelings of competence, do not understand others' emotions, and have hostile social problem-solving patterns would enter the classroom sphere of learning at a distinct disadvantage with teacher and peers alike."

According to Schulman & Barnett (2006), "Early education programs can improve commitment to education, lower rates of involvement with crime, increase likelihood of delaying parenthood, improve health behavior, and result in higher rates of civic participation among children who have attended the programs." This NIEER report recommends further research to clarify how preschool programs can produce the greatest long-term benefits for children's social and emotional development and life choices. They look at seven studies that provide key evidence on the effects of preschool programs and how these effects play out over the course of participants' lives (e.g., completion of more years of schooling; higher educational expectations; higher motivation levels; pride in achievement-related accomplishments; more likely to be employed in skilled jobs). The studies showed significant impacts on better social adjustment, reduced antisocial behaviors, reduced tendency to commit crimes.

According to Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg (2004), "Social-emotional learning is not a separate entity, and need not (should not) be addressed in isolation. Research has supported the concept that SEL skills are easily and logically integrated with academic learning. The concept of school success is not limited to academic performance, but can be reflected in many ways. Examples include school *attitudes* (e.g., motivation, responsibility, attachment), school *behavior* (engagement, attendance, study habits), and school *performance* (e.g., grades, subject mastery, test performance). These are important components that can foster commitment to academics and effective school performance." They note that "Social and emotional education involves teaching children to be self-aware, socially cognizant, able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship-management skills so as to foster their academic success." (p.6). These beliefs are echoed by Marchesi & Cook (2012), who point out evidence that "integrating emotional intelligence into broader SEL initiatives helps reduce adverse behaviors, including poor attendance and disciplinary infractions such as bullying."

Raver (2002) cites a series of studies over 20 years that have clearly demonstrated that children's emotional and social skills are linked to their early academic standing. They say: "How large a difference does children's emotional adjustment make? Children's emotional and behavioral difficulty with peers and teachers is not just a 'feel good' issue. Children's aggressive, disruptive behavior has serious, long-term costs, both to the children themselves, and to their communities." Research is cited showing that children with social/emotional difficulties are likely to lose out academically in many ways (e.g., lower academic achievement, greater likelihood of grade retention or dropping out of school) as well as greater risk of delinquency and of committing criminal juvenile offenses in adolescence. The findings suggest that policy makers should broaden early elementary educational mandates for school readiness to include children's emotional and behavioral adjustment as key programmatic goals. Recommendations include: targeting children prior to school entry, in diverse settings; broadening early elementary educational

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mandates for school readiness to include emotional and behavioral adjustment; consistently assessing children's emotional adjustment, using psychometrically valid measures; supporting children with interventions that span a range of programmatic intensity, and paying close attention to issues of quality assurance and attrition.

Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich & Gill (2013) report that gains in positive social behavior during Head Start predicted positive social behavior in kindergarten. In addition, Head Start gains in emotion understanding and competent social problem solving predicted reading achievement in kindergarten. Preschool gains in both cognitive skills (e.g., emergent literacy) and social-emotional skills (e.g., understanding of emotions and positive social behavior) each uniquely predicted learning engagement in kindergarten.

A wide range of significant associations between emergent literacy and social-emotional development were identified by Tan (2013), who studied socio-emotional correlates of emergent literacy skills. Assessing emergent literacy skills with standard language and literacy tests (oral language, expressive/receptive language and print awareness), results showed significant associations between emergent literacy and social-emotional development.

Self-management skills are identified by many researchers as key to academic learning. Rivers, Tominey, O'Bryon & Brackett (2013) focus on *self-regulation* (conscious control of thoughts and actions including ability to understand and regulate emotions, cognitions, and behaviors) and *social competence* (ability to demonstrate conscious control of thoughts and actions in social interactions). Zinsser, Weissberg & Dusenbury point out that "Self-management, including the ability to focus attention, resist distractions, and regulate emotions, is a fundamental skill that undergirds all of academic learning. Children's social and emotional competencies prepare them to meet the demands of the classroom, engage fully in learning, and benefit from instruction." "Ultimately, developing such competencies prepares young people for successful careers and lives as productive citizens and leaders in our communities." (Campbell & vonStauffenberg, 2008; Denham, Brown & Domitrovich, 2010).

An earlier study by Moffitt et.al. (2011) demonstrated that childhood self-control predicts physical health, substance dependence, personal finances, and criminal offending outcomes. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011) defines and describes executive function (EF) skills and how adults can support them. They report evidence that executive function interventions produce benefits in early literacy and math skills, along with evidence that emerging EF skills contribute to early reading and math achievement during the pre-kindergarten years and into kindergarten.

There are many different aspects of academic success, defined by Denham & Brown (2010) as follows:

- "*Sense of competence*: Children develop a sense of whether they are capable at tasks they are called upon to perform at school. A sense of one's academic abilities likely fuels continued gains in achievement. A child who feels that he or she is competent in a specific academic area may be more likely to seek out opportunities to further hone his or her increasing skills, thereby increasing the perception of competence. In sum, research suggests that a child's self-awareness, or perceived self-competence, may lay the groundwork for future academic accomplishments. Perhaps children's perceived self-competence provides them with the confidence they need to take more risks in the classroom, in both participating and attempting challenging academic problems.
- In terms of *emotion regulation*, children who have difficulties dealing with negative emotions may not have the personal resources to focus on learning, whereas those who can maintain a positive emotional tone might be able to remain positively engaged with classroom tasks. Mild negative emotional expressiveness was negatively related to teachers' ratings of the children's persistence and learning attitudes, whereas observed emotional dysregulation was negatively related to teachers'

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ratings of children's motivation to learn.

- *Understanding of emotion*: Researchers are increasingly confirming a link between academic success and young children's understanding of emotion. Children's ability to understand emotions, especially in context, plays an important role in their concurrent and later academic success.
- *Responsible decision making*: studies suggest that responsible decision making, or choosing a prosocial response when facing adversity, appears to assist in the academic success of the child.
- *Relationship/social skills*: Those high in aggression and low in prosocial behavior had the biggest deficits in school adjustment (e.g., not following rules and routines, lacking enthusiasm about learning). However, only prosocial deficits—again, not in combination with aggression—negatively predicted academic achievement.
- *Peer relationships* are very important contexts for children of the age range studied here, although in slightly different ways at the preschool and school ages. So are the relationships with teachers and parents. The child's interpretations of these relationships, and the judgments made by teachers, parents, and peers about the selfsame relationships, are crucial potentiators of SEL-in-practice in the school environment, thereby affecting academic success. The authors contend that negative aspects of children's relationships with kindergarten teachers (i.e., dependency and conflict, as rated by teachers) are related to their academic success through eighth grade. The views of both members of the teacher-child relationship are important predictors of academic success.
- *Interrelations among components of SEL*: It is crucial to remember that the components of SEL do not exist in isolation but rather build off of the strengths and deficits of one another."

Nadeem, Maslak, Chacko & Hoagwood (2010) report that "Data suggest that children's academic competence during their school years is greatly influenced by their social-emotional competencies during the early childhood period. Children who have lower social-emotional competence are less likely to perform well academically; reciprocally, children with lower academic competence often suffer from subsequent social-emotional difficulties. Moreover, social-emotional competence often uniquely predicts academic success, even when other key factors, such as early academic competence, are taken into account." They contend that traditional methods of assessing academic competence using instructional content, standards-based test performance "fail to assess the acquisition of and disposition to apply the critical and flexible thinking skills that are crucial for the development of students as learners" and suggest that "children must develop both the ability and disposition to use and integrate social-emotional knowledge, regulatory abilities, empathy, perspective taking, and social skills in a seamless manner that is appropriate for the child within the given social context." Teglasi (2010) summarizes two gatherings funded by the National Science Foundation that focused on cross-disciplinary discourse to examine overlaps between children's academic achievement and socioemotional competence, pointing out the interrelationship/influences between the two domains.

Research by Williford, Whittikaer, Vitiello & Downer (2013) supports the theory that high levels of social engagement with peers and adults leads to high levels of academic engagement, which led to the development of skills and understanding of concepts, and supported school readiness and success.

A study by Vesely, Brown & Mahatmya (2013) showed that young children's care environments, specifically children's interactions with mothers and care providers, contribute to children's social and emotional development. Findings from this study can be used to support policy initiatives regarding the inclusion and integration of SEL competency development in children's overall school readiness.

The Frameworks Institute (2009) views child development as a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. They contend that "Brain plasticity and the ability to change behavior decrease over time and

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getting it right early is less costly, to society and individuals, than trying to fix it later (Pay Now or Pay Later).

A report by the National League of Cities (2012) focuses on reading at grade level by the end of third grade, but also links SEL to other factors that support academic growth. One key is alignment of standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments with a focus on both social competence and academic skills to build on what children have learned and how they have learned it from one level to the next. This report includes a case study of Boston's early childhood initiatives, including Thrive in Five.

Research on Social Skills (Social Awareness/Social Relationships)

Social relationships include relationships with peers as well as with adults who are important in their lives. The impact and significance of social relationships go far beyond maintaining classroom behavior management. Research evidence shows that relationships and interactions with parents, caregivers, and other adults important in a child's life actually shape brain circuits and lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes, from academic performance to mental health and interpersonal skills. This report summarizes the most current and reliable scientific research on the impact of relationships on all aspects of a child's development, and identifies ways to strengthen policies that affect those relationships in the early childhood years. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004)

Eisenberg & Spinrad (2006) present philosophical, psychological, and historical theories on prosocial development covering a wide range of ages, with a section specific to early childhood. They examine theories on altruism, behaviorism and the developmental evolution of prosocial behaviors, and review studies on how these behaviors evolve. They explain that emotion plays a particularly important role in the development of prosocial values, motives, and behaviors. Especially relevant are empathy-related emotions. "Definitions of *empathy* vary; we define it as an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and which is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel. Attention to the needs of others transforms egoistic affect to other-oriented affect, rendering it increasingly altruistic. Throughout infancy and childhood, children develop an increasingly refined understanding of others' emotional states and cognitive processes, and are better able to decode other people's emotional cues."

What begins as friendship can evolve into much more. Goldman & Buysse (2008) explain the broad benefits of friendship. "Young children who are friends may challenge themselves and the friend to try new and more complicated tasks. Some interactions between children of this age may appear to the casual observer to be meaningless or without structure, yet many involve reciprocal turn-taking, and a clear awareness of how the actions fit together." They offer various ways that parents and educators can foster relationships." Tarim (2009) presents a study examining the effect of cooperative learning on young children, describing an intentional classroom strategy for cooperative learning and specific classroom activities. Children need to "discuss, explain, and elaborate what is being learned. In order to create an environment that facilitates problem solving, children should interact within a cooperative context" and also need to "gather ideas, think of many possibilities, question, analyze, and justify their procedures and results." Tarim says: "Cooperative interactions promote learning and cognitive development because children teach, guide, and assist one another when solving problems and completing tasks together."

Axelrod (2014) discusses ways that teachers can support dramatic play with culturally and linguistically diverse children, explaining that play promotes children's learning about social behaviors, cultural practices, and ways of communicating with others. Play also provides opportunities for children to blend their multiple languages and cultural practices, helping children make sense of the different cultures they bring to their classrooms and play settings. Axelrod also provides a study guide.

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O'Neill (2010) explains how activities based on theater improvisation can help preschoolers, especially those with disabilities, to develop social skills. Children can work together to create scenes, thereby accepting and building on one another's ideas.

Bergen (2001) defines a cluster of concepts related to pretend play and cognition. The article briefly synthesizes the latest research on the role of pretend play in children's social and linguistic competence, and discusses challenges and policy directions. The connection between play and receptive and expressive language, and executive functions (mental representation) are highlighted. "Pretend play requires the ability to transform objects and actions symbolically; it is carried out through interactive social dialogue and negotiation; and it involves role taking, script knowledge, and improvisation. Policy makers need help in understanding the relationship between play and the development of cognitive skills. The research evidence is clear that play has a role in young children's general development. Proponents of play must be ready to demonstrate how the development of the cognitive skills exercised in pretend play are also essential for later school success and good test performance."

ECLKC (2014) offers a website with ideas for increasing children's opportunities to practice social skills and emotional competencies on an everyday basis. These ideas can be used by professionals or families.

What Teacher Characteristics or Classroom Strategies Support SEL?

"I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized." – Haim G. Ginott

Standards for students must be connected to competencies for teachers, with concurrent training and professional development at the preservice and inservice levels. Teacher competencies are the foundation - the knowledge and skills that lead to their actions and interactions with children, the environment they create for children, the activities they design for learning, and strategies they use to guide behavior.

Research shows that "one of the most consistent findings in the early childhood literature is that an emotionally warm and positive approach in learning situations leads to constructive behavior in children." (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

According to Cimino, Forrest, Smith & Stainback-Tracy (2007), "The development and utilization of competencies related to promoting social and emotional development and preventing and addressing challenging behaviors is a critical strategy for assuring the pre-service and in-service training prepares the workforce to address the social and emotional needs of young children. The competencies should describe the knowledge and skills early care and education providers need to support young children's social and emotional development." They provide a compilation of the knowledge and skills and/or program standards that impact social and emotional health from three nationally recognized standards, along with a list of evidence-based competencies, and a state-developed list of competencies. The compilation "demonstrates where these national and state sources converge on the topic of social and emotional development." It also demonstrates the relationship of each competency to the professional competencies described in *Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC's Standards for Programs* (2003).

The Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning [CSEFEL] present a *Pyramid*

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Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003; Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006). This model presents “a multitiered framework that organizes empirically supported teaching practices for promoting social-emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior of preschool children.” Synchronized with the Pyramid Model, the *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool* (TPOT) is an instrument “designed to measure practitioners’ implementation of teaching and behavior support practices associated with the Pyramid Model (Hemmeter, Fox & Snyder, 2014).

A study by Curby & Brock (2013) showed that consistent emotional support was related to academic and social outcomes, emphasizing the potentially important role of consistency in children’s school experiences. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was used to assess teachers’ use of Emotional Support. Curby & Chavez (in press) used CLASS to study which dimensions of the classroom environment were most strongly predictive of children’s achievement. Results indicated that Positive Climate, Productivity, and Concept Development were the best predictors of the four academic outcomes. The results suggest that these three dimensions should be given priority when it comes to policies, professional development, and observations meant to change or monitor student academic achievement.

Downer, et. al. (2010) explain that “Effective teaching in early childhood care and education settings requires skillful combinations of explicit instruction, sensitive and warm interactions, responsive feedback, and verbal engagement/stimulation intentionally directed to ensure children’s learning while embedding these interactions in a classroom environment that is not overly structured or regimented... These are classrooms in which teachers create a welcoming atmosphere, foster connections between students, refer to children by name and know details about children’s lives outside of the classroom, give children individualized attention, and provide regular opportunities for children to speak their minds and work independently. Emotional supports are seen as contributors to a sense of security that allows for exploration of novel, stretching experiences and a feeling of connectedness to teachers and schools that contributes to a motivation to learn.” They outline key classroom characteristic as follows:

- *“Organizational Support:* Educational research and practice place tremendous emphasis on the role of organization and management in creating a smoothly functioning classroom. Organizational supports are theoretically aligned with children’s development of self-regulation by ensuring that their behavior, time, and attention are well managed. Teachers proactively and subtly manage children’s behavior, are prepared with lesson plans and materials so that children rarely experience down time, minimize long transitions, clearly demonstrate expectations, and ensure that activities provide many opportunities for active engagement. Self-regulatory skills, both behavioral and attentional, are linked to the external regulations provided by classroom contexts.
- *Instructional Support:* Instructionally supportive interactions are hypothesized to facilitate children’s cognitive and language development through meaning-based instructional discussions, feedback that expands learning, and language stimulation and facilitation techniques. These interactions occur in classrooms in which teachers ask questions that require problem-solving and higher-order thinking, provide opportunities to apply previously learned knowledge to new situations, embed learning within real-world contexts, initiate frequent feedback loops that prolong learning moments, and model the use of language for multiple purposes (e.g., social/ pragmatic, vocabulary, narrative). Theory on children’s cognitive and language development highlights the importance of learning facts in a meaningful, interconnected way and, through scaffolding, from simpler to more complex concepts, with a consistent emphasis on understanding thought processes that can be reapplied to later learning material.
- Having specialized training in early childhood or child development may be a more important contributor to the quality of interactions than simply holding a bachelor’s degree. A more salient predictor of the quality of interactions tends to be teacher beliefs and psychological functioning... the

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quality of teacher–child interactions is contingent upon the teacher’s ability to respond to the child’s socioemotional and cognitive needs and offer emotional support when appropriate.

- There is strong evidence that the emotional climate of the classroom has an influence on children’s social outcomes, including social competence, peer and teacher relationships, and behavioral adjustment. Teachers who have stronger classroom organization tend to have children with higher levels of engagement, behavioral and cognitive control, and motivation. Teachers who are able to provide richer instructional opportunities (e.g., open-ended questions, scaffolding) have students who make greater academic progress. Instructional support in pre-kindergarten classrooms continued to predict the acquisition of academic and language skills in kindergarten above and beyond the effects of kindergarten instructional support, suggesting that the influence is substantial and lasting.”

Various researchers present support and strategies for teachers. Jones, Bouffard & Weissbord (2013) summarize the competencies teachers need to effectively guide student behavior and learning. They emphasize that SEL skills impact everything “from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout.” The teacher competencies presented align with SEL dimensions for children.” Stuber (2007) supports the value of distinct learning centers for kindergarten and early primary grades, where children can explore, investigate and play. Stuber provides specific ideas for supporting academics in learning centers, defined as “distinct interest areas in a classroom that offer various materials and opportunities for hands-on learning at individually appropriate levels... Children need both child-guided and adult-guided experiences for optimal learning. Strong relationships between adults and children enhance learning.” Jablon & Wilkinson (2006) provide an overview of engagement research and present various strategies that can be used to engage children in social emotional learning.

Zinsser, Weissberg & Dusenbury (2013) note that SEL describes *a process* of acquiring a set of skills or competencies and that this process is grounded in the relationships a child has with his social partners such as parents, peers, and teachers. Teachers increasingly are recognized as playing an important role in *teaching* social and emotional skills to children. They believe that variability of emotional support should be included as an indicator of classroom quality, and emphasize the importance of assisting teachers with managing classroom-related stress.

Dobbs-Oates (2011) investigated the relations among preschool teachers’ behavior management, children’s task orientation, and children’s emergent literacy and language development, as well as the extent to which task orientation moderated the relation between teachers’ behavior management and children’s emergent literacy and language development and found that there was a significant interaction between teachers’ behavior management and children’s task orientation.

In a review of research findings, Raver & Knitzer (2002) provide “take away messages” about SEL and its relationship to academic learning and behavior, the role of teachers/providers. They offer recommendations about the need for early interventions that “simultaneously address cognitive, social, and emotional issues, recognizing the links between social and emotional development and successful academic learning, including early literacy.” Seitz (2006) encourages teachers to listen to and capitalize on children’s spontaneous interest and curiosity. The article outlines a plan that teachers and families can use to learn about what a child or a class is interested in and plan an authentic learning experience around that interest. Seitz outlines a four-step process of investigation, circular in nature and often evolving into new investigations. The article supports emergent curriculum based on authentic experiences.

A study by Bradley, Atkinson, Tomasino & Rees (2009) indicated student growth on four developmental dimensions (social/emotional, physical, cognitive and language development), implying that these dimensions can be improved/enhanced. They say: “Establishing this key set-point *early* in the child’s life,

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when neural connectivity is still highly malleable, and then sustaining it throughout the educational process with programs building on these fundamental skills, can set the child on a life course of health, well-being, achievement and social responsibility. Correspondingly, the integration of programs designed to foster socioemotional competence into educational curricula - beginning at preschool - should help prevent manifestation of much of the psychosocial dysfunction and pathology that not only robs individuals of a fulfilling life but also results in an enormous cost to society.”

Denham, Bassett & Zinsler (2012) present a theoretical review exploring possible teacher roles in the development of young children’s emotional competence, and hypothesize that teachers’ socialization of emotional competence will promote social-emotional and even academic success in school. They point out that “children who have difficulties in this area may not have resources to focus on learning, whereas those who can maintain positive emotions may be able to better engage with classroom tasks.” They define emotion regulation as “(1) abilities to handle emotions in productive ways: being aware of feelings, monitoring them, and modifying them, when necessary, so that they aid rather than impede coping in varying situations; and (2) expressing emotions appropriately.” They note that Hyson (2002) calls on early childhood educators to help young children to understand and regulate emotions, as teachers themselves model appropriate emotions and responses to emotions, teach about emotions, and use positive emotions to support learning. Because research into the contributions of the early childhood teacher as vital socializer is lacking, Denham et. al. call for research in this area.

Research on Evidence-Based Strategies/SEL:

SEL programs can produce a variety of benefits. Payton et. al. (2008) summarize findings and implications of three large-scale reviews of research evaluating the impact of SEL programs for school children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The SEL programs were effective in both school and after-school settings and for students with and without behavioral and emotional problems. They were also effective across the K-8 grade range and for racially and ethnically diverse students from urban, rural, and suburban settings. SEL programs can produce a variety of benefits. Payton et. al. (2008) summarize findings and implications of three large-scale reviews of research evaluating the impact of SEL programs for school children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The SEL programs were effective in both school and after-school settings and for students with and without behavioral and emotional problems. They were also effective across the K-8 grade range and for racially and ethnically diverse students from urban, rural, and suburban settings. Students who participated in these programs demonstrated significant improvement.

“The promotion of social-emotional learning goals is no longer seen as “separate” or even parallel to the academic mission of schools; rather, it is essential and can be taught and implemented in schools in a number of ways.” (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004).

“Education programs that incorporate SEL can play a crucial role in developing protective factors in youth which mitigate the negative developmental and behavioral effects of exposure to conflict. This is achieved through building intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are necessary for managing emotions and building healthy relationships. SEL strengthens the healing and coping mechanisms needed to deal with adversity, violence and suffering, essential for healthy development (Varela et. al., 2013). Denham & Brown (2010) identify a number of effective prevention/intervention SEL programs that have been shown to enhance the development of SEL skills (self- and social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsibility in a school setting), and that also explicitly target academic success.

Following their review of several behavior support curriculum programs, McCabe & Frede (2007) contend that “Curriculum needs to include, along with a cognitive and academic focus, an emphasis on the development of social and emotional skills. Teachers and other professionals and parents must then

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build on that strong curricular base by providing additional layers of the teaching pyramid that address specific needs of children who exhibit or are at risk for developing challenging behaviors.” Schulman & Barnett (2006) found that the effectiveness of preschool education in improving social-emotional development and reducing crime can depend on the type of curriculum used. For example, the High/Scope Curriculum Study suggests that a preschool curriculum with a strong role for child-initiated learning and personal responsibility is most likely to produce positive outcomes - just 6% percent of those who had the High/Scope curriculum, which emphasized child-initiated activities, needed treatment for emotional impairment or disturbance during their schooling, compared to 47% percent of children in the Direct Instruction group.

The Head Start REDI (Research-based, Developmentally Informed) study (Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich & Gill, 2013) examined three different programmatic interventions related to school readiness (compared to usual practice Head Start). Results showed significant gains in social emotional skills and kindergarten outcomes in reading achievement and learning engagement. The study supports the importance of fostering SEL skills of at-risk children to promote school readiness:

- When children experience rejection by peers or conflict with teachers as a result of aggressive or oppositional behavior, they are less likely to work independently and comply with classroom rules and responsibilities, this results in low levels of participation and weakened academic achievement.
- Executive function skills (working memory, inhibitory control, attention set shifting) enhance children’s capacity for goal-oriented learning and flexible problem solving, and also support acquisition of emergent literacy and math skills.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2003) conducted a systemic review of many nationally available evidence-based SEL programs and provides information on program design, instructional practices, evidence of effectiveness (including evaluation results and whether the program appears on other Federal lists of recommended programs), and whether the program includes implementation supports and activities or tools to support a safe learning environment. Later, Zins, Bloodworth & Weissberg (2004) discuss CASEL’s report, noting that “In a review of the 80 nationally available programs, CASEL found that 34% of the programs included methods to promote the integration of SEL with academic curricula and teaching practices. For example, some encourage students to apply SEL skills such as goal setting to improve their study habits; others emphasize integration of SEL with academic subject matter (e.g., by providing a literature selection that requires using conflict resolution skills to resolve a disagreement between characters in the novel). Others promote teaching practices such as cooperative learning and effective classroom management. All of these approaches can have positive effects on academic performance, especially those that had teachers acquire and use more effective teaching techniques; 83% of such programs produced academic gains.”

Results from CASEL’s later (2010) meta-analysis of studies of SEL programs [see Social and Emotional Learning Group, University of Illinois] showed that students who participate in school-based programs focused on social and emotional learning benefit in many ways compared to students who did not experience SEL programming. It is also reassuring to note that such positive results did not come at the expense of performance in core academic skills, but rather enhanced academic achievement, and follow up data supported that these results were maintained. Students improved significantly with regard to:

1. Social and emotional skills
2. Attitudes about themselves, others, and school
3. Social and classroom behavior
4. Conduct problems such as classroom misbehavior and aggression
5. Emotional distress such as stress and depression

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6. Achievement test scores and school grades, including an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement

In another meta-analysis of research on SEL programs, Durlak, et.al. (2011) concurs with CASEL's findings: "SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems, and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades." It appeared that "SEL programs are successful at all educational levels (elementary, middle, and high school) and in urban, suburban, and rural schools." Their analysis suggests that because the SEL programs were carried out by classroom teachers and school staff, "interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for effective delivery."

A later report by CASEL (2012) provides an overview of research connected to strong social emotional competencies and the connection to learning, and supports direct instruction/support of SEL in classrooms. Guidelines for selecting appropriate SEL curriculum/programs are presented, along with a description and comparison of various SEL curricula. The guide is set up with grids that show what is taught/how, skills assessed and method.

Morris, Millenky & Jones (2013) reviewed research on the impact of various SEL programs for preschool children living in poverty. While value was seen in increased instructional time and increased classroom engagement, teachers' instructional quality and children's academic skills were not significantly improved. They hypothesize that a substantial reason for the low levels of instructional time is that teachers are having trouble managing their classrooms and spending too much time trying to obtain compliance from disruptive children, and present supporting evidence. They also present converse evidence that teachers who are able to structure emotionally positive, supportive classroom environments have students who go on to perform better over time in both academic and behavioral outcomes.

The Head Start Cares project, (Morris et.al. 2014) examined the impact of three SEL programs that were used as interventions/enhancements to the existing Head Start curriculum, all of which included teacher training, coaching and technical assistance. Findings showed that evidence-based approaches can improve preschoolers' social-emotional competence when implemented with appropriate supports. While all three improved children's emotional awareness, the enhancements affected somewhat different *aspects* of children's social-emotional competence. The enhancements did not necessarily produce the expected effects on improving children's problem solving skills, executive functioning, or behaviors.

- *The Incredible Years Teacher Training Program* focuses on teachers' management of the classroom and of children's behavior. It improved children's emotion knowledge, social problem-solving skills, and social behaviors. It did not produce expected impacts on children's problem behavior and executive function (except for highest-risk children).
- *Preschool PATHS* uses structured lessons to help children learn about emotions and interact with peers appropriately. It showed small to moderate improvements in children's knowledge and understanding of emotions (emotion knowledge), social problem-solving skills, and social behaviors
- *Tools of the Mind - Play*, a one-year program that promotes children's learning through structured "make-believe" play, is adapted from the original two-year "Tools of the Mind" program. It did not demonstrate expected impacts on executive function or self-regulation; it produced only positive impacts on emotion knowledge.

Kendziora, Weissberg, Ji & Dusenbury (2011) include a review research on SEL standards in various states, the academic impact of SEL, and resources on SEL guidance for teachers. Biglan et.al. (2012)

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review research on nurturing environments as a factor in fostering successful development and as a preventive factor for psychological and behavioral problems. They describe key features of nurturing environments and summarize evidence about how each feature influences development. They also review evidence-based programs in schools as well evidence-based parenting intervention programs.

Denham & Brown (2010) cite a number of effective prevention/intervention programs—effective in the sense that they enhance the development of SEL skills. All work to effect change in all, or a combination, of children’s self- and social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsibility in a school setting; some have parent components as well, and all explicitly target academic success.

What elements of SEL Programs are Important?

Morris et.al. (2014) found the following:

- *Infrastructure*: improvements in teachers’ practices and children’s skills emerged when well-designed, evidence-based models with prepared written materials were supported by high- quality and ongoing [teacher] training and coaching, including feedback, and reflection.
- *Models*: improving children’s understanding of emotions, social problem-solving skills and behaviors may be accomplished either by supporting teachers’ positive classroom management practices or by explicit teaching of emotional understanding and social skills through lessons- based approach.
- *Behavior regulation & executive function skills*: None of the models improved these outcomes for children. The field faces a challenge in identifying approaches to support children’s development in this area.
- *Assessing teacher practices*: findings suggest the importance of assessing and strengthening specific teacher practices in efforts to enhance children’s social-emotional development.
- *Long-term academic (or social) benefits* of investing in social-emotional development are not yet clear.

Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg (2004) present “Essential characteristics of effective SEL programming.:

Carefully Planned, Theory and Research Based

- Organized systematically to address identified local needs
- Based on sound theories of child development, learning, prevention science, and empirically validated practices
- Implementation monitoring and program evaluation incorporated during planning process

Teaches SEL Skills for Application to Daily Life

- Instruction in broad range of social-emotional skills, knowledge, and attitudes provided in developmentally and socioculturally appropriate ways
- Personal and social applications encourage generalization to multiple problem areas and settings
- Helps develop positive, respectful, ethical attitudes and values about self, others, work, and citizenship
- Skills include recognizing and managing emotions, appreciating perspectives of others, setting positive goals, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal interactions effectively

Addresses Affective and Social Dimensions of Learning

- Builds attachment to school through caring, engaging, interactive, cooperative classroom, and school-wide practices
- Strengthens relationships among students, teachers, other school personnel, families, and community members
- Encourages and provides opportunities for participation
- Uses diverse, engaging teaching methods that motivate and involve students
- Promotes responsibility, cooperation, and commitment to learning

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- Nurtures sense of security, safety, support, and belonging
- Emphasizes cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity

Leads to Coordinated, Integrated, and Unified Programming Linked to Academic Outcomes

- Offers unifying framework to promote and integrate social-emotional and academic development
- Integral aspect of formal and informal academic curriculum and daily routines (e.g., lunch, transitions, playground, extracurricular)
- Provided systematically to students over multiple years, prekindergarten through high school
- Coordinated with student support services efforts, including health, nutrition, service learning, physical education, psychology, counseling, and nursing (continued)

Addresses Key Implementation Factors to Support Effective Social and Emotional Learning and Development

- Promotes a safe, caring, nurturing, cooperative, and challenging learning environment
- Monitors characteristics of the intervention, training and technical support, and environmental factors on an ongoing basis to ensure high-quality implementation
- Provides leadership, opportunities for participation in planning, and adequate resources
- Institutional policies aligned with and reflect SEL goals
- Offers well-planned professional development, supervision, coaching, support, and constructive feedback

Involves Family and Community Partnerships

- Encourages and coordinates efforts and involvement of students, peers, parents, educators, and community members
- SEL-related skills and attitudes modeled and applied at school, home, and in the community

Design Includes Continuous Improvement, Outcome Evaluation, and Dissemination Components

- Uses program evaluation results for continuous improvement to determine progress toward identified goals and needed changes
- Multifaceted evaluation undertaken to examine implementation, process, and outcome criteria
- Results shared with key stakeholders.”

Researchers from CASEL (2003) identified the essential aspects of effective SEL practice. Thirty-nine guidelines were developed based on their scientific investigations, reviews of the empirical and theoretical literature, visits to model sites throughout the country, and personal experiences in implementing and evaluating SEL practices. They reviewed 80 nationally available programs. Some interesting indication are that in successful programs, teacher training in social and emotional learning is consistent with professional teacher preparation standards, showing that educator preparation programs should include SEL. Professional preparation of educators is a challenge, and a concern is that the field should include not only didactic instruction, but also field experiences with supportive, competent supervisors that mirror effective SEL practices. Successful programs also included efforts to promote school engagement and bonding, home–school partnerships, and cooperative learning.

Improved teachers’ practices (and instructional content) are thought to improve the quality of the classroom experiences (classroom climate), for children. However, in the Head Start Cares Project, Morris et. al, (2014) found that the enhancements did not show universal or long-lasting effects on all dimensions of teachers’ classroom organization, classroom management strategies, or relationships with children.

What does research tell us about social emotional learning in diverse language learners (DLLs) and/or children with disabilities?

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Children with disabilities, physical or otherwise, face the same social and emotional challenges as do typically developing children, but with additional complications. For example, a child with a learning disability may experience accelerated emotions associated with “being different” that include low self esteem, depression, a sense of isolation, depression, etc. The child may further be set back due to the very benefits other children derive from positive interactions between teachers and classmates that lead to higher language fluency, relationships with others, acceleration of excitement about learning and acquisition of knowledge. Children with disabilities often feel that the school is a place where they have no control, feel left out, and are not “smart” or capable like others.

According to Bellini (2006), an expert in Autism Spectrum Disorders, lack of social skills may not be because of lack of interest, but may be due to lack of “know-how.” Although teaching these skills may not be the same for all children, he maintains that there is a common approach which works well. “Effective (SEL) programs follow a series of steps. Beginning with an assessment of a student’s social functioning, educators distinguish between those deficits that can be successfully addressed and those that are unlikely to respond to intervention. For example, the inability to ask a question may be due to either inadequate socialization, or an aspect of a specific condition or disability. Such behavior may also be due to a performance problem, in which a student knows what to do, but uses an ‘inappropriate’ response because it meets his/her needs. In any case, successful treatment begins with a thorough, individualized assessment, which then forms the basis for a specific intervention strategy. Educators then monitor student progress to modify or refine the intervention, if needed.” Bellini’s work includes a description of the process and various strategies.

There may be different beliefs or expectations for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which, according to research, may not be well-founded. Halle et.al. (2014) conducted a targeted search of the literature from 2000 to 2011 that examined social-emotional outcomes for DLLs in family, school, and peer contexts. Results suggest that DLLs have at least equal (if not better) social-emotional outcomes compared to native English speakers. There is also some evidence that use of home language in early childhood classrooms can be a positive, moderating factor for DLLs’ social-emotional development.

The Center for Early Care and Education Research conducted a review of research (2012) and found no significant differences in social emotional development in DLLs/non-DLLs. In fact, they say that “becoming a fluent bilingual speaker has social emotional benefits compared to being monolingual in either language.” The social-emotional competence of DLL children in preschool and elementary settings, (indicated by measures such as frustration tolerance, task orientation, and self control), may be higher than that of their monolingual peers. Other findings included: There are socio-emotional benefits to fluent bilingualism (bilingualism may be associated with different trajectories of self-regulation). Spanish speaking children had stronger task orientation and instruction-following skills at school entry than monolingual English or Spanish speakers.

The Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (2011) provides an annotated bibliography of works linking social and emotional development and dual language students and families.

What does Research Tell Us about Assessment of SEL?

In Massachusetts, assessment is limited to a few accepted tools under the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) system. For Kindergarten children, school districts will use a formative assessment tool that is evidence based and aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. EEC, in collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, will support school districts in using a formative assessment tool that measures growth and learning across all developmental domains. During the kindergarten year, MKEA is meant to provide kindergarten teachers with data across

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developmental domains (physical, social emotional, approaches to play and learning). Participation is required for all districts receiving the quality full day kindergarten grant. Data is collected via Work Sampling and TS gold as well as through observation and should be used to inform instruction and to support children in various ways (i.e., inform IEP process, support WIDA and RETEL, assist with RTI and tiered support). EEC has identified Teaching Strategies-GOLD System as the assessment tool for cohorts 3 and 4. Teaching Strategies GOLD is an assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten that addresses the following Developmental Domains: (1) Social-Emotional, (2) Physical, (3) Language, (4) Cognition, (5) Literacy, (6) Mathematics, (7) Science and Technology, (8) Social Studies, (9) The Arts, and (10) English Language Acquisition. (MKEA, 2013).

Denham & Brown (2010) present an array of useful assessment tools for each SEL component, all of which have reliability and validity. There are instruments for assessing self-perceptions, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationships skills.

Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich & Gill (2013) describe measures they used to assess various dimensions of SEL. [See original document for specifics about these tools].

- *Emotion understanding* was assessed using “Assessment of Children’s Emotion Skills” and “Emotion Recognition Questionnaire.”
- *Competent social problem solving* was assessed with an open-ended version of the “Challenging Situations Task.”
- *Positive social behavior* was assessed using the “Social Competence Scale” and an adapted version of the “Teacher Observation of Child Adaptation–Revised.”

Denham & Brown (2010) describe useful assessment tools for each SEL component that are reported to have excellent reliability and validity. [See original documents for details about these assessment tools.]

- *Self-Perception*: “The Self Description Questionnaire for Preschoolers” (SDQP); “Berkeley Puppet Interview” (BPI); “The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children” (PSPCSAYC); “The Perceived Competence Scale for Children” (PCSC).
- *Self-Management*: “The Head Toes Knees Shoulders Task” (HTKS); “The Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment” (PSRA); “The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment” (DECA); “The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment” (DESSA); “Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation” (SCBE-30); “The Social Skills Rating System” (SSRS) more recently packaged as the “Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales” (SSIS).
- *Social Awareness*: “Denham’s Affect Knowledge Test”(AKT); “The Kusché Affective Interview–Revised” (KAI-R).
- *Responsible Decision Making*: “The Challenging Situations Task (CST).
- *Relationship Skills*: “The Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist” (MPAC); “The Penn Interactive Preschool Play Scale” (PIPPS)

Denham, Hideko, Zinsler & Wyatt (2014) present a case for effective assessment to highlight specific needs of children and classrooms using a battery of assessments that would “enable practitioners to make instructional decisions based on valid and reliable assessments of SEL.” Reports that a research team is “conducting ongoing work computerizing emotional knowledge, social problem solving, and social-emotional behavior measures for use by educators in the early childhood classroom; methods under development require little training, are very simple to perform, and will yield reports on a child’s or classroom’s progress.” Irwin, O’Dwyer & Cook (2014) provide information on the use of assessments and standards in early childhood settings.

Kagan, Scott-Little & Clifford (2003) examine the nature of assessment for young children and the

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challenges it poses, and offer critical considerations for policymakers.

Implications for Teacher Training and Professional Development

Denham & Brown (2010) say “In order to provide the optimal learning environment for every student, teachers should be trained in programming and assessment tools that not only assess but also assist in forming interventions that promote SEL abilities. Policy initiatives that encourage teacher awareness of SEL abilities will not only foster a more harmonious classroom environment but will also help form a stable social–emotional foundation that the child will use across social and learning contexts.”

Federal & State Legislation

There is widespread, even national recognition about the importance of social emotional learning to human adjustment and relationships, and school success. Recently (April, 2014) federal legislation was introduced that provides strong support for social and emotional learning (HR4509). This bill introduced in the House of Representatives by U.S. Rep. Susan Davis (D-Calif.), amends the Higher Education Act (HEA) to make sure students preparing to be teachers learn about SEL in their coursework. It also amends the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) to make research on the importance of SEL a priority at the Institute of Education Sciences and makes SEL an allowable use of funds for grants made through two other HEA programs.

Under Massachusetts state legislation slated to be applicable September 1, 2016 (amendments to current legislation):

- All applying to teach in Massachusetts must have training in social-emotional learning.
- And must “be able to appropriately apply social-emotional learning skills within the chosen instructional field.”

(An Act to Include Social-Emotional Learning as a Training Requirement to Obtain Provisional and Standard Teaching Certificate SEL SAMlegislation Massachusetts)

How Do SEL Standards Connect to Common Core Standards?

Zakrzewski (2014) contends that SEL skills are implicitly embedded in Common Core. Looks at alignment with CASEL’s framework of social emotional outcomes and provides advice to teachers on how to support students. Presents examples of linkages between SEL and Common Core standards in various academic learning domains.

Elias (2014) presents an interview about shortcomings in the Common Core as a follow up to a paper published by the Education Advisory Council of the Character Education Partnership entitled *Integrating Common Core and Character Education: Why It Is Essential and How It Can Be Done*. Interviewees present rationale for implementing the Common Core under conditions that support SEL.

The Common Core Standards (NGA, 2010) define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach (e.g., the use of play with young children is not specified by the Standards, but it is welcome as a valuable activity and as a way to help students meet the expectations). The Common Core Standards leave room for state/local agencies to connect students learning in a variety of ways. While SEL is not addressed explicitly, some SEL skills are embedded in long term outcomes:

- Students demonstrate independence: without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts; construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information; request clarification, and ask relevant questions; articulate their own ideas; become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and using resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and print and digital reference materials.
- Students are engaged and open-minded - question an author’s or speaker’s perspective

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- Students come to understand other perspectives and cultures; seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening, able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds; evaluate other points of view critically and constructively. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

What Resources Can Guide Massachusetts' Work?

The prior work done by many other states in developing standards for social emotional developing and/or approaches to play and learning will help in structuring standards children and guidance for teachers for preschool and kindergarten in Massachusetts.

Isakson, Higgins, Davidson & Cooper (2009) present definitions of key concepts related to establishing indicators in social-emotional development, along with a framework for developing local priorities. And Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow (2010) describe key decisions that committees working on early learning guidelines (ELGs) should consider. It is intended as a guide for those charged with the important task of developing and/or revising ELGs.

Connors-Tadros (2013) explains how some states have addressed social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and executive function, in learning standards for children birth through age five. Provides an overview of several states' standards in SEL and Approaches to Learning and how each model can be useful. Describes a process for developing/revising SEL standards.

Galinsky's *Mind in the Making* (2010) can help us structure guidance for teachers and families about to promote healthy approaches to learning life and develop children's important life skills.

New Jersey Department of Education Division of Early Childhood Education (2011) describes guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice specifically for five- and six-year old children and high quality kindergarten programs, particularly in the areas of self-regulation and play.

The National Governors Association, (2013) produced a memo designed "to inform a state's interest in integrating social-emotional development and learning dispositions and skills in PreK-12 learning standards. It provides a preliminary look at how some research, policy, or education organizations have classified skills that contribute to academic success and focus on areas beyond literacy, mathematics, and academic subjects. The classifications are all based on these organizations' reviews of the research. The memo also provides an overview of the different approaches that some states have taken to integrate these skills into their PreK-12 learning standards." There are two parts to the memo: Part I: Classifying the Skills, and Part II, How States Translate Research into Learning Standards.

Bodrova, Leong & Shore (2004) present an overview of how states have addressed standards in various areas, offers an overview of the conditions needed for standards to work, and describe special considerations that must be taken into account if child outcome standards are to have a positive impact on preschool children and programs.

Zinsser, Weissberg & Dusenbury (2013) provide strong guidance for developing and aligning SEL standards across the grades. "It is important to note that SEL describes a *process* of acquiring a set of skills or competencies, not the skills themselves... Learning standards are statements about what students should know and be able to do as a result of educational instruction. When standards are well-written and well-implemented, they create consistency in education and communicate priorities to staff, students, and families... With regard to SEL, the separate development of standards for preschool and K-12 students has resulted in independent sets of standards at the two levels, [which] reflects lack of coordination both in terms of terminology used to describe social-emotional competencies and the emphasis placed on SEL

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within the state.” The document includes key components of high-quality SEL learning standards, and highlights Illinois and Pennsylvania SEL standards as models. They advise that “development of SEL standards should adequately encompass the full range of necessary social and emotional competencies. It should also be evident which social-emotional competency or competencies each standard is addressing (i.e., CASEL framework). Without a solid framework for what SEL is, state standards will not address all of the necessary dimensions of SEL. They recommend that standards include benchmarks on what children should learn, as well as guidelines on how teachers can support that learning (suggestions for teachers and caregivers as to how to help children develop the skills at each grade). Standards for each age/grade should clearly build off previously acquired skills/goals and align with the next phase/ stage of standards, and be written with relatively narrow age/grade bands.

The development of Massachusetts Learning Standards in the areas of Social and Emotional Development, and Approaches to Play and Learning presents a unique opportunity to incorporate this important research for the benefit of our children, families, communities, and Commonwealth.

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